Post 11/21/75

# *Nixon Speaks*

THE SAGE OF San Clemente has offered the American people some characteristic observations and moral advice in an interview appearing in the December issue of the Ladies' Home Journal. Brave to a fault, Mr. Nixon doesn't want us worrying about his own personal hardship: "As you can see," he told the interviewer who was visiting his ocean front estate in California, "we are *not* in a lap of luxury here, but we get by." Rather, the former President wanted to share his worries about the condition of the American people. Many of them are also trying to "get by," of course, in somewhat less comfortable fashion. But the people's material well-being was not what was on Mr. Nixon's mind. On the contrary—and as usual—he was concerned about the condition of our collective national soul.

The former President's musings on this vexed subject are a constant theme running through his remarks on a variety of topics. Thus: "We are so cynical, so disbelieving ...We are a compromised country at the moment...We have very little leadership in our country today. Can you name any strong religious leaders? The media has abdicated its fact-gathering to non-believing young people, who seem to want to break down our values...if the church and the media and business and educators all allow the undermining of our strength and values, we will keep drifting that way..."

What to do? The interviewer, William M. Fine, put the question directly to a reflective Mr. Nixon, asking how he would meet this grave challenge if he were President, and sure enough there was an answer: "He lit his pipe and said: 'That's a question I have puzzled over more than once. I think I would ask five or six of the best brains around me to go off on a retreat for several weeks and ponder some things...'"

All this is so deeply moving that we hate to intrude with the recollection that Mr. Nixon actually *was* President once. And an awful lot of "fact-gathering" went forward in that period, with the result that practically everybody—not just young people—ended up wanting to break down the values for which Mr. Nixon turned out to have stood. We will leave aside the question of how much public cynicism Mr. Nixon's own behavior bred—and continues to breed: his statement to Mr. Fine that "we had nothing to do with Chile or Allende," sits oddly with the Church Committee's assertion that in the fall of 1970, "the CIA was instructed by President Nixon to play a direct role in organizing a military coup d'etat in Chile to prevent Allende's accession to the presidency." We would observe only that he seems to have missed one terribly important point: for the past two years the Special Prosecutors's office has in fact been trying to get five or six of the best brains around Mr. Nixon to go off on a retreat for several years, not just several weeks, where they could—to use his phrase—"ponder some things." Understandably, they don't seem to want to go.